

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

1-10: DEATH & DESTRUCTION

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Failing to stop Teron escaping with what he stole from the Jedi outpost, the occupants of the *Swift Exit* pursue him to a shadow port. However, what he took was locked away for a good reason and when it is unleashed on the shadow port the consequences threaten to be more than just two Jedi and a former smuggler can handle alone...

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1.

Located at a significant distance from its star the moon that Teron Sharr's transport headed towards received most of its heat from the gas giant it orbited. Along with this came a significant level of radiation that was harmful to most carbon-based species and so when it had been decided to settle the moon to mine the valuable mineral deposits found there the mining colonies had been built underground in vast caverns that could be pressurised and shielded against the radiation. Later on when it ceased to be economically viable to continue mining operations on the moon the shielding equipment had been left behind and now it served another purpose, for as well as preventing the energy of the gas giant penetrating the caverns and poisoning everyone inside it also made energy emissions from the caverns much harder to detect and what was able to escape looked more natural than the often repeating patterns of modern technology.

"So how much are we going to ask for this stuff?" one of Teron's men asked him. The other man was much older than Teron but, like the rest of his gang, he treated Teron with the deference due to a man who had demonstrated an almost unnatural ability if not affinity for killing.

When Teron looked towards the man he saw him holding a jedi lightsaber that had not been used for thousands of years. Following a galaxy-wide conflict that had split both the Jedi Order and the Republic itself almost right down the middle the weapon and several others like it had been stored away by the Jedi Order along with numerous other relics of that time. Teron's master had told him where to find these but obtaining them had not been the primary purpose of his recent mission. That had been to access the records of the jedi outpost where these relics had been stored to discover the location of a Sith outpost from the same era, an outpost where a glass cylinder and its mysterious contents had remained hidden from the victorious jedi. "It's junk Krovak." Teron replied, "I'll be satisfied as long as we make enough to cover the cost of this expedition."

"Seriously?" the other man said as his men exchanged glances, "This is jedi stuff. They aren't exactly known for holding surplus sales if you take my meaning. We're sitting on a goldmine here, you're throwing away a fortune."

"They are the trinkets of weak men who hid from real power when it was offered to them. No, all that matters to me is what's in that cylinder. Take the rest and get the best price you can for it by all means but after our costs are covered then the rest is yours."

Teron's men smiled. This had been their first major operation since he had forcibly replaced the gang's previous leader and to hear that they were all going to make a large sum of money of out of it rather than just getting a small percentage after their leader took most of the money for himself was news to be celebrated.

"You hear that lads?" Krovak called out, "It's party time!" and there was a loud cheer from the others in the ship.

Effortlessly penetrating the magnetic shield used to keep atmosphere in and radiation out the transport set down in a massive cavern that had been used as a hangar even during the days when the shadow port was a legitimate mining colony. However, rather than the bulky ore carriers that had been used to export the colony's produce the cavern was now home to several dozen much smaller transports, all of them with crews here to trade on the black market. Some, like Teron's gang, had come to dispose of goods that could not be sold on the open market either because they were illegal to deal in or were stolen.

"We'll take a look around first." Krovak told the rest of the gang, "Take a look at what's being offered and what we can use. Then we decide what to do with what we've got."

"Do we tell people what we're offering?" someone asked.

"Of course." Krovak answered, "It's not like they can break in here while Mister Sharr's guarding the ship."

"Not coming for a drink with the rest of us then?" another gang member called out but Teron ignored him.

"Enough." Krovak said, "Let's get out there and see what we can find."

With his men gone Teron settled down to read. Despite having dismissed the jedi relics as 'junk' he and his master could still make use of the information held within the outpost's computer and for that reason he had his men rip the back up drive out of its mounting while they were looting the outpost of its treasures. Most of the information was worthless, records of personnel duties and performances along with supply levels. But there were also more useful files such as communication logs and navigational files that provided either clues to or specific locations of other jedi outposts hidden in the Outer Rim territories. When he returned to his base of operations Teron would present this information to his master and he would then take a decision on what was worth acting on. Future raids on jedi outposts would likely be easier than this first one. The money his men would share would attract new recruits, eager to share in the spoils while the current members of the gang would undoubtedly spend at least some of their shares on new weapons that would add further firepower to their strength.

Teron was concentrating so hard on the jedi records that he barely noticed when two of his men returned to the transport just over an hour later. Though Krovak had instructed them merely to look around for now it was obvious that they had instead chosen to begin their celebrations early and both men were drunk.

"What are you doing back here?" Teron asked.

"We came back to get one of those old laser swords." one of the pair responded, "We found a guy that will swap one for all the spice we can load on this crate."

Teron snorted. Trading one lightsaber for at least a hundred tonnes of spice was a good deal, especially if it could be cut to further the profit margin. The problem was that neither of the pair seemed in a state to be negotiating for anything.

"Get to your bunks." Teron told them, "Sleep it off. You can tell Krovak about it when he gets back." and he turned his back on the two men. But as he did so he heard a sudden 'thunk' as one of them banged into a counter and this was followed by the sound of something hard rolling across the surface before it fell to the floor and smashed, "No!" Teron screamed as he turned around once more and saw the precious cylinder now lying smashed on the floor, the golden liquid it held forming a wide puddle while the milky residue remained as a large clump amongst the broken glass.

"Hey it's okay." the drunken man who had caused the cylinder to break said as he crouched down, "This gunk is still all together." and he reached his hand down towards the clump of white. But as he did so Teron felt a sudden surge of power through the Force.

From within the clump of sticky white material something akin to a narrow black worm sudden emerged as it propelled itself up towards the man who was unable to pull his hand away in time. He flinched as the worm struck the back of his hand and started to travel rapidly up his arm and he slapped his other hand down on it as if to squash it. However, the impact instead seemed to push whatever the worm was made of down into the flesh of his arm as well as the palm of his hand to create a dark shadow beneath his skin and as he pulled his hand away a strange stringy substance stretched out between it and his arm.

"What the kriff is that?" the other drunken man exclaimed, his eyes open wide as he stared in disbelief at what was happening to his friend. But Teron did not answer. Instead he turned towards the outer hatch and started to run, "Hey, where are you going?" the man called out after him, "He needs-" and he started to turn back towards his friend. But before he could finish his sentence and just as Teron was leaping through the hatch he was interrupted as the creature in front of him punched a blackened fist through his chest.

2.

The YT-700 class freighter *Swift Exit* dropped out of hyperspace only a short distance away from where Teron's transport had made its exit. This was no mere coincidence, a modification made to the other transport had signalled the jump co-ordinates input into its navigation computer to the vessel currently operating on behalf of the Jedi Order. In the cockpit the ship's owner Tylo Kurrast sat in the pilot's seat while the Jedi knight Jayk Udra sat beside him and Jayk's padawan and niece Brae sat behind them.

"Right on target." Jayk said as he studied the readouts of where they had emerged from hyperspace.

"But where are we?" Brae asked, "And where is that transport?"

"We're still in the Outer Rim." Tylo replied, "The Uratas system."

"That's pretty remote." Jayk added, "Plus no sign of the transport. In fact the system appears to be empty.

"Oh they're here somewhere. We just need to figure out where." Tylo said before Brae suddenly let out a gasp and Jayk sensed her become tense.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"It's here." she said.

"Huh?" Tylo commented, "What's 'it'?"

"Whatever it was that the raiders took from that Sith outpost." Brae replied, "I sensed it back then and I can sense it now on that moon ahead of us, but-

"But what Brae?" Jayk asked when she suddenly stopped talking.

"It feels different." she said.

"Different? How can it be the same thing if it's different?" Tylo asked.

"It's stronger." Brae replied, "Like the difference between how you feel in the Force when you're asleep compared to-" and she trailed off again.

"Compared to how? Come on kid, try finishing a sentence." Tylo said.

"Compared to when you're awake." Jayk said, "Whatever the raiders took from the Sith outpost was in a dormant state then. Now however, it's active."

Tylo looked ahead at the moon orbiting the gas giant.

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." he said.

"Set a course for that moon but just put us in orbit, don't land until we have more information." Jayk said as he got out of his seat and headed out of the cockpit.

"Where are you going?" Tylo called out after him.

"To seek expert advice." Jayk replied.

When Jayk got to the *Swift Exit*'s lounge area he walked up to a small crystalline cube that was sat on a shelf at the side of the room. Behind him

"Cal, we need your help." Jayk said and moments later a hologram of another man in Jedi robes materialised in front of him and Brae.

Cal Udra had been a Jedi knight more than three thousand years earlier and during his life had created a holocron that in addition to offering a record of all the information he had chosen to include also featured a reproduction of his personality as its guardian to control who was able to access particular information. Cal's younger sister had been his padawan learner just as Brae was now Jayk's and the Jedi Council had decided that as such Cal's experience could be of benefit to Jayk and provided him the holocron.

"Of course." Cal said.

"We've tracked the raiders to a moon orbiting a gas giant." Jayk told him.

"So Tylo's plan worked? I thought it would." Cal said, "So how can I help?"

"The raiders have brought whatever it was that they took from the Sith outpost here but it's stronger than it was." Brae said, "Do you have any idea what it might be?"

Cal thought for a moment as his internal circuitry attempted to match the vague description with everything recorded inside him.

"It doesn't sound familiar." he said eventually, "Remember, the problem is that every Sith wanted to do things his own way. They all wanted some means to establish their dominance over their fellow Sith but were afraid of creating anything too powerful just in case they lost control of it. That meant that they built weaknesses into their creations that they could exploit if they had to and none of them ever copied another Sith exactly. If they did then their rivals would know how to defeat their armies."

"But if we took you with us you might be able to figure out how to deal with whatever it is that they've got down there, correct?" Jayk asked.

"I might yes. I encountered quite a few Sith creations in my time and there are several strategies that can be used to determine their weaknesses." Cal said.

"Good. In that case Brae we had better get ready. If we are about to enter the enemy stronghold then I doubt

that we will be made to feel welcome.”

“Hey!” Tylo's voice then called out from the cockpit, “I think you better come take a look at this.”

Jayk returned to the cockpit and stood behind Tylo.

“What have you found?” he asked.

“Something big I think.” Tylo replied and he pointed to the sensor display, “Look, the emissions we're picking up look like the natural radioactivity of that gas giant right? But watch what happens when I do this.” and he adjusted the *Swift Exit's* position to place it between the gas giant and the moon, “There? See?” he asked.

“The emissions are coming from the moon, not the planet.” Jayk said.

“Exactly and they look just like the sort of signals you get from the magnetic fields used to seal hangars against vacuum.” Tylo added.

“The returns are too large for a hangar.” Jayk pointed out.

“Maybe, but not for a subsurface installation that needed shielding against the radioactivity being put out by that gas giant.” Tylo said. Then he pointed to part of the display, “Look, there's a hotspot right there. I bet that's a hangar.”

“Are there any signs of defences?” Jayk asked and Tylo shook his head.

“If there were any then they should have reacted before we entered orbit. Right now we're probably invisible to passive sensors and I'm not picking up any active ones running.”

“That would spoil their camouflage.” Jayk commented.

“Exactly. So my guess is that remaining hidden is their only defence.”

Jayk considered this for a moment. If this was the base of operations for the gang they had been tracking for the past few months then it meant that they had better resources than anyone had suspected. But waiting for reinforcements risked giving them the opportunity to make use of these against the *Swift Exit* and evacuate before they could arrive. That left only one alternative.

“Take us in.” he said, “Brae and I will be ready.”

Jayk and Brae waited next to the *Swift Exit's* access ramp as the ship came in to land. Unlike on previous occasions when they had prepared to deploy from the ship as quickly as possible they did not open the access ramp in advance. To do so now would have resulted in the air inside the ship being blown out into space and them along with it. Instead they waited for Tylo to confirm that they were through the magnetic shield and safely inside the hangar. However, when Tylo's call came it was not to let them know that they could deploy safely.

“You better get up here and take a look at this.” he told them over the intercom.

“On our way.” Jayk replied and he and Brae hurried to the cockpit where they found that Tylo had already landed the *Swift Exit* in the hangar.

“What's wrong?” Brae asked.

“Take a look outside kid.” Tylo said, pointing through the cockpit canopy and looking outside the ship the two jedi saw numerous transport craft in the cavern that served as a hangar.

“I don't get it.” Brae said, “They all look perfectly normal to me.”

“They are.” Jayk responded, “But according to our best intelligence they should not be here.”

“If Morton Crayne's gang had access to all these ships then he wouldn't have needed to hire me to smuggle the stuff his people were stealing,” Tylo pointed out, “he'd have had someone already on his payroll who could handle that for him.”

“Then why are those ships here?” Brae said.

“Because this is not the headquarters of Morton Crayne's gang.” Jayk answered, “Or at least not exclusively. He may still be here but I think that we have stumbled across a shadow port. The group that attacked our outpost may have come here to transfer their stolen goods to another ship.”

“Well there's the one they arrived in.” Tylo said and he pointed to where Teron's transport was docked. Then he looked at Brae, “Picking anything up with the Force?” he asked.

“Something yes. But not from there.” she replied.

“This is wrong.” Jayk said suddenly.

“What is?” Tylo asked, frowning.

“Look outside.” Jayk replied, “All those ships and how many of their crews can you see? Or technicians servicing them?”

“There are-” Tylo began before he realised that there were no signs of life in the hangar at all, “You're right.” he said, “There ought to be dozens of beings out there. So where did they all go?”

“I think perhaps we should investigate.” Jayk said and Tylo winced.

“Oh I had a bad feeling you'd say that.” he said.

Tylo retrieved an armoured vest and rifle before joining the two jedi by the *Swift Exit's* access ramp and only then did Jayk open it so that they could all disembark from the ship together. Outside the ship the hangar was eerily quiet with none of the normal sounds that any of the group would normally associate with such a place. Only the humming of the jedi's lightsaber blades broke the silence.

"We should split up." Jayk said.

"Yeah, we can cause more damage that way." Tylo muttered and Jayk frowned.

"Just stay close enough that we're all in earshot of one another." the jedi said as he began to walk away from the *Swift Exit*.

Brae and Tylo copied this, each one heading in a different direction. Brae made her way towards a nearby scout ship. The sleek vessel looked sealed and lifeless and she could sense nothing from within it. But just as she was about to turn away and investigate another vessel she spotted something in the shadow beneath the scout.

"Blood!" she called out, "Lot's of it."

"Where?" Jayk asked as he hurried over to her, followed not far behind by Tylo.

"All over the place." Brae said, "On the floor under this ship and on the landing struts and hull as well."

"She's right." Tylo said when he saw the blood for himself, "That's a lot of blood. No humanoid species I know of could produce that much on their own and live."

"Yet there is no body." Jayk pointed out.

"The blood's smeared over there." Tylo said, pointing to the far side of the pool of blood on the floor,

"Someone could have dragged the body away."

"They must have loaded it into something." Jayk said.

"The ship that brought them here perhaps?" Brae suggested and Jayk nodded in agreement.

"That is a distinct possibility." he said, "Perhaps we should investigate it before we explore further."

Heading towards Teron's transport, the group kept watch for any other signs of violence or of anyone else in the hangar with them. By the time they reached the transport they had seen nothing further however, but the transport itself changed that.

"What the kriff did that?" Tylo exclaimed when he saw the outer hatch ripped away from its mounting and lying close by on the hangar floor.

"Either someone outside wanted to get in without the correct code." Jayk began, "Or-"

"Yeah I get it." Tylo interrupted, "Someone inside wanted to get out."

"I can't sense anything." Brae commented, "Though everything around here seems to be resonating with the Force more than normal. It could just be blotting out whatever's in there."

"Brae will wait out here." Jayk announced, "I don't want to risk her being overcome by the shock if there is something in there." The risk of Brae becoming overwhelmed by something able to produce a powerful disturbance in the Force was a real one. Though her midi-chlorian count was exceptionally high even for a jedi she lacked control over her powers and by taking the highly unusual step of assigning her to serve with a close relative the jedi council had hoped she progress by seeing what her family was capable of. But until she learned this every encounter with the Dark Side of the Force in particular risked corrupting her.

"So us two then?" Tylo asked.

"Correct."

"I'll take point." Tylo said, bringing his rifle up to his shoulder, "No sense putting you in my line of fire." and then he stepped through the remains of the hatchway.

The interior airlock door looked undamaged and the transport's power was still on, suggesting that its systems had not been badly damaged by whatever had caused the damage to the outer hatch. However, as soon as Tylo stepped out of the air lock he saw a familiar looking pool of liquid on the floor in front of him.

"More blood here." he called out, "No body again though." then he saw a pair of open crates across the room and smiled when he noticed what was inside them, "But I do have the stuff they stole from your outpost." he said as he slung his rifle over his shoulder and walked over to the crates, grabbing hold of one in each hand. Moving backwards, he then dragged both of them back towards the air lock as Jayk watched.

"Excellent." he said, "We better get these back aboard the *Swift Exit*. Then I think we should try looking around this place. I know we're not alone here but I don't understand why this section is deserted."

When Tylo reached him Jayk shut off his lightsaber and took hold of one of the crates and the two men began to drag them out of the airlock. But as they moved neither one of them noticed the clump of milky white matter among broken glass on the floor across the room.

When they emerged Brae looked at the crates and frowned.

"So why just leave all these things here?" she asked, "It must be worth a small fortune. A lightsaber is worth thousands to a collector and I can see several of them in these boxes. Plus everything else."

"Perhaps whoever did so expected to be able to return for them." Jayk suggested.

"Or maybe they just didn't want to risk walking around this place with something so valuable." Tylo added and he looked at the hatch on the floor close by him, "Maybe that's what this is. Someone tried to break into the ship to steal them."

"Then why not take them after going to all that effort?" Brae asked.

"Hopefully we will find an answer to that elsewhere around here." Jayk replied, "But right now there are many questions that need answering."

3.

Teron could hear the sound of firing as he made his way through the network of caverns that made up the shadow port. There was no organised security force here to deal with the sudden and unexpected attack and so the defence of each individual cavern and structure depended on how well its inhabitants could co-operate with one another. As things were turning out that appeared to be not very well at all. Most of the shadow port's inhabitants either concentrated on protecting their own property while leaving others to be attacked while others chose to simply try and hide until someone else managed to get the situation under control. The difficulty for those that hid was that the force now spreading throughout the shadow port was quite able to root out even the most cunningly concealed beings, sensing their presence in the Force regardless of intervening objects providing that they were close enough. Worse still, as each victim was found and attacked they did not always just die. Instead some would get back to their feet, seemingly just as enraged as their assailants and would charge headlong towards the closest victim they could find and in this way their numbers multiplied while those of the shadow port's defenders grew smaller. To put even greater pressure on the inhabitants of the shadow port its attackers displayed a considerable resistance to damage. They could be killed just as any living creature could, but they obviously felt no pain and any injury that was not immediately fatal meant that they could continue to attack until they finally bled to death or they sustained an injury that prevented them from moving. The result was a steady advance through the shadow port as those of its inhabitants who remained unaffected were pushed further and further back into an ever decreasing area.

"Mister Sharr!" a familiar voice called out above the panic and Teron turned to see Krovak and a handful of his men pushed their way through the crowd towards him.

"Krovak." Teron responded, "How many of you are left?"

"It's just us I think. A couple tried to head back to the ship but since you're here I'm guessing that's not an option. Do you know what's happening?"

"That nerf herder Pulson came back drunk and broke the damned jar!" Teron hissed, trying not to make himself heard too widely in case he became the victim of mob justice for being responsible for what was happening, "He let this out."

"So he's-" Krovak began before Teron interrupted him.

"Right at the heart of this. Yes." he said, "We need to find a way out of here."

"I think that's what's on everyone's mind right now. Problem is that there's only one way out. The hangar." Krovak said.

"Then we need to come up with another. There must have been something, an emergency exit left over from this place's days as a mine." Teron said.

"Maybe." Krovak replied, "Come this way and I may be able to find something."

Brae paused as she felt a disturbance in the Force and was overcome for a moment. But she was not the only one to have sensed this, the combined emotions of so many beings combined was easy for a Jedi to pick up.

Terror.

"Master." she said.

"I know, I feel it too." Jayk replied.

"Feel what?" Tylo asked, "Non-jedi here, remember?"

"The beings here are afraid for their lives. Very afraid." Jayk told him. Then all of a sudden he felt a shiver run down his spine as he sensed the nearby presence of the Dark Side of the Force and he turned his head in the direction of the disturbance.

"Master what's wrong?" Brae asked, too inexperienced and overwhelmed by the widespread influence of the Dark Side to be able to pick out any specifics. However, before he could respond there was a scream from between two of the simple prefabricated structures that made up the majority of the shadow port and a figure appeared running towards them.

"Get out of here!" he yelled, waving his arms towards the trio when all of a sudden a cluster of beings appeared, chasing after him.

"Holy kriff!" Tylo exclaimed when he saw them. Every one of the newly appeared group had a wild look on their face and showed signs of injuries. Some of these looked like the burns associated with minor hits from blasters but every last one also had assorted cuts and gashes on their bodies.

Before Tylo or either of the Jedi could act one of the lead members of this wild looking mob caught up with the fleeing man and tackled him, emitting a savage growl as he forced the man to the ground and then dug

his teeth into the back of his neck.

Instinctively Tylo brought up his rifle and opened fire with it set to automatic, spraying energy blasts into the rest of the mob. He saw his shots strike several of the mob only for them to have no noticeable effect and he gasped as they kept on coming towards him.

"Brae help him!" Jayk yelled, indicating the man being attacked on the ground while he charged at the mob and swung his lightsaber at them. Everywhere he struck Jayk sliced off a limb or a head or impaled one of his opponents but just as Tylo had experienced not all of his attacks had the effect they should have had. Not one of them gave any indication of reacting to the sudden loss of a limb other than the effect of no longer having the use of it, while impaling a target only worked if it was through the heart or the head. Anything else meant that the mob kept on coming. Fortunately they attacked without any sense of co-ordination or skill, simply reaching out to try clawing or biting at Jayk who was able to avoid these attempts and remove several more limbs and heads in the process while the mob managed mainly to get in one another's way as more than one of their number attempted to attack at the same time.

Meanwhile Brae had only to concern herself with a single member of the mob and she charged up to him with her lightsaber held in one hand. Rather than simply swing the blade at the man, an action that risked injuring or even killing his victim in the process, she reached out with her free hand and lifted his head away from his victim. The man snarled and growled at this, blood running down his chin from where he had bitten into his victim's flesh and he attempted to bite Brae as well. But now she had pulled him into a more raised position she was free to make use of her lightsaber and she plunged the tip of her blade into his chest so that it impaled him through the heart. The man then gave out one last gasp as he died and as Brae let go of him he collapsed in a heap and rolled off his victim.

Seeing that Jayk was holding his own, Tylo rushed to Brae's side as she shut down her lightsaber so that she could see to the injured man at her feet. Covered in his own blood, he appeared seriously hurt at first glance but on closer inspection Brae saw that he was in no real danger of succumbing to his wounds. His assailant had bitten and scratched at his face and there were similar wounds on his arms from the man's attempts to defend himself but none of them were deep and no major blood vessels had been opened. Clearly dazed by the attack the man continued to lie on his back staring up into the air.

"Lie still for a moment." Brae told the man as she reached for a medpac. Then she looked at Tylo and added, "Tylo I'll deal with this you-" and then she stopped, her eyes widening.

"What's wrong kid?" Tylo asked, looking directly at her and he stepped closer and reached out to put a hand on her shoulder.

"Look out!" Brae yelled suddenly as she pushed Tylo back at the same instant that the injured man on the ground sat up suddenly, his eyes now wide open and looking bloodshot and he let out a growl at the same time as he lashed with one hand out at Brae. His attack caught her arm but failed to penetrate the fabric of her robes. Brae reacted by using the hilt of her lightsaber as if it was a short baton and slammed the pommel into the man's face to produce a 'crunch' and a spurt of blood as his nose was crushed. But whereas any ordinary person would have been at least temporarily incapacitated by such a blow the only effect on the man was when his head jerked backwards under the force of the impact before he glared at Brae and snarled before lunging forwards with both arms outstretched.

Brae reacted by leaping backwards and igniting her lightsaber. But at the same time as there was the usual 'snap-hiss' from her weapon there was also the sound of a blaster shot as Tylo shot the man in the chest and before he could reach Brae or get to his feet he fell dead.

"What's going on back there?" Jayk called out as he continued to try and hold the rest of the mob at bay though he was slowly giving ground.

"This guy wasn't quite as grateful as we thought he'd be." Tylo replied, "Perhaps we should think about getting out of here."

"A good idea I think." Jayk said and he suddenly extended one hand with the palm held forwards. But rather than use it to strike one of his remaining opponents the Jedi used it to help him focus on releasing a controlled blast of telekinetic energy through the Force and all of a sudden what was left of the mob was thrown several metres backwards away from him, "Run!" he yelled as he turned around and started to sprint.

"Which way?" Brae called out.

"Just follow him." Tylo told her as he started to run as well and Brae sighed. Then she saw the mob getting back to their feet and starting to turn in her direction.

"Good idea." she said and she ran after the two men.

"Okay from what I've been able to find out the section up ahead leads to a set of tunnels used in the early construction of the mines." Krovak said and he pointed to the exit from the cavern they were currently in that would undoubtedly lead to yet another similar cavern.

"Will they lead all the way back to the hangar?" Teron asked but Krovak shrugged.

"Your guess is as good as mine." he answered. Then there was the sound of blaster fire from close by.

"Kriff!" one of the other gang members exclaimed, "Those things are here."

"No they aren't, not yet." Teron said as he stared in the direction of the blaster fire and he smiled, "That's just someone taking advantage of the situation to settle a score with their neighbours."

"And that's a good thing?" the other gang member asked.

"From a certain point of view." Teron replied, "The strong will prosper and the weak will fall. That simple truth will always be born out in the end."

"And what if we get caught up in any of this settling of scores?" Krovak asked.

"Then we'll just have to prove how much stronger we are than anyone thinks otherwise." Teron said.

4.

Taking shelter in a deserted building that looked as if it had been recently ransacked, Jayk, Brae and Tylo finally found themselves with time to evaluate what they had seen, "Okay I'm going to say it." Tylo said and he pointed back outside, "What kriff is going on here? What were those things?"

"I'd guess that they were the inhabitants of this place until something happened to them." Jayk replied as he produced Cal's holocron from his robes and righted a small upturned table to set it down on, "Cal." he said simply and the hologram of the jedi materialised.

"You have more information for me I presume?" he said.

"If being confronted by a mob of lunatics counts as information, then yes we kriffing well do." Tylo responded.

"Lunatics?" Cal commented.

"A mob we can only assume was made up of members of the local population." Jayk said.

"I doubt the locals would take kindly to knowing that there were jedi walking among them." Cal pointed out.

"Maybe not." Tylo said, "But would they instantly try and eat us?"

"Ah." Cal said, "No. I don't think so."

"It's the Dark Side." Brae said suddenly and the others looked at her, "I felt it." she continued, "Right before that man I tried to save attacked Tylo and me. One minute he was just some scared guy who had just been attacked and then all of a sudden he became something else. Like someone just flipped a switch and turned him to the Dark Side."

"Is that possible?" Tylo asked, looking at Cal.

"Yes it is. The Sith had all manner of ways of corrupting people. Even jedi weren't immune. My sister and I-

"So you know what this is then?" Tylo interrupted.

"Err, no." Cal said, "Did any of you notice anything that could have been of Sith origin that would have caused the man Brae describes to turn?"

"No, nothing." Jayk answered.

"He just turned." Brae added, "He went from being human to acting like some sort of animal."

"An animal?" Cal said and his hologram frowned.

"That is a reasonable description." Jayk replied.

"An animal that's hard to kill." Tylo said and he held up his rifle, "I put shots into some with this that should have brought down a bantha but they kept coming."

"I experienced the same." Jayk agreed, "Injuries that ought to have been crippling had no effect. Only removing their heads or taking out their hearts seemed to stop them."

"Kriffing zombies." Tylo muttered.

"What was that?" Cal said.

"I said that they remind me of zombies." Tylo said.

"Zombies aren't real." Brae said.

"You've obviously never tried raising teenagers." Cal commented.

"But the point is correct. There is no such thing as a zombie." Jayk said.

"Err, maybe there is." Cal said.

"See? I told you. Zombies." Tylo exclaimed, "Cal agrees with me. It must be true."

Cal, could you explain further?" Jayk asked.

"Of course. The Force is a path to abilities that many would consider unnatural." Cal said, "The sorcerers of the Sith Empire found many ways of bending life to their will and created many monsters to do their bidding. Among these were a number of reanimated corpses, kept alive only by the will of their creator. Their bodies were dead but the Sith would craft new essences to place inside them. Essences that were of course rooted in the Dark Side. I never encountered any myself, but They could be quite effective troops as well, able to use any weapon they could hold."

"Well fortunately these can't." Jayk said, "I noticed several had weapons holstered or tucked into a belt or pocket but none of them even tried to draw them."

"No, I didn't think they were. The zombies I'd heard about were created by Sith ritual. Beings didn't just suddenly become them as you've described." Cal said.

"I know what I felt." Brae protested, "That man turned into one of them in moments."

"Right after he was attacked and bitten." Tylo said, "He got infected."

"We can't know that for certain." Jayk pointed out.

"No but it's a reasonable assumption." Tylo responded.

"Yes it is." Cal said, "I'd say we're dealing with some sort of Sith created disease or more likely a parasite of some kind. Something that can be transmitted by touch into the bloodstream, a bite wound for example and

then makes its way to the brain of the new host where it takes over their motor functions and senses.”
“Meaning that they wouldn't feel pain.” Jayk said with a smile, “Whatever causes the infection literally isn't connected to the host's nervous system so they can carry on fighting until the host body gives out entirely.”
“Okay so how do we fight something like this?” Tylo asked, “For all we know the entire place has been overrun.”

“No.” Brae replied, “There are still beings left alive in here.”

“Well my question still stands. How do we fight these things?” Tylo said.

“If they aren't using weapons I'd have thought that a force of armoured troops or droids would be effective.”
Cal said, “Droids would be better, there's always the chance of equipment failure leading to infection with living troops.”

“A force like that large enough to secure this place would take time to gather., Jayk said, “and I doubt that time is on our side.”

“Why do you say that master?” Brae said.

“Because if there are still people left alive in here then eventually some of them are going to make a break for that hangar to escape.” Tylo said, “It's what I'd do.”

“And every ship that leaves runs the risk of carrying this to another system.” Jayk explained, “A system far more densely populated than this one. Perhaps even into the Core Worlds where we could be looking at billions of infected subjects very rapidly.”

“We need to take out the ships in the hangar.” Tylo said, “Or destroy the hangar itself.”

“How?” Brae replied.

“Orbital bombardment.” Tylo said, “We need to get back to the *Swift Exit* and call in the nearest warship. Someone round here must have one. We only need one good turbolaser strike to bring the whole thing down.”

“That would offer a temporary solution.” Jayk said, nodding.

“Temporary? Sounds pretty permanent to me.” Tylo responded.

“Whatever is causing the infection would still be here.” Cal pointed out, “A way needs to be found to prevent anyone else from landing to retrieve it for themselves.”

“An issue we can worry about after we have escaped. But for now we need to concentrate on getting back to the *Swift Exit* before that infected mob we escaped from return and in greater numbers.”

The edge of this particular cavern was characterised by a cluster of ramshackle buildings that now housed a group of beings who were busy ripping them apart. The previous inhabitants had proved no match for the well armed group and their bodies lay unceremoniously dumped a short distance away where they had been burnt to prevent them suddenly rising as zombies, that term having been applied to the infected by more than just Tylo and there being no real understanding of how the infection was spreading. The intent of those now hard at work tearing down the crude structures was to create a final redoubt where they could dig in and resist the horde of the infected.

Unfortunately the location of this hastily improvised fortress lay right in the path that Teron and his men needed to take.

A blaster bolt flew from a concealed position and hit one of Teron's men, sending him sprawling over what remained of an already dismantled structure.

“Back!” Teron snapped and he and his men took cover.

Another blaster shot flew overhead as Teron peered around the pile of scrap he was concealed behind and he ducked back before another could take off his head.

“Get out of here!” a voice called out, “This is our territory now.”

“I don't care.” Teron responded, “You can keep it if that's what you want but one way or another we're coming through.”

“Try it.” the voice called out again and Teron looked at Krovak.

“That cargo container.” Krovak said and he pointed to a large metal container covered in faded paint that many years earlier would have identified the shipping company it belonged to but now was just patches of pale colours, “I reckon he's hiding right next to it under that metal sheet.”

“Just the one?” Teron asked and Krovak nodded.

“For now.” he replied, “A sentry positioned to give them advanced warning of an attack. But if anything happens to him you can bet you last credit that more will come running fast enough.”

“Then everyone needs to be ready.” Teron said, “We'll go as soon as he's dealt with.”

“What are you planning?” Krovak asked and Teron smiled.

“My master has shown me the powers at my disposal.” he said, “Now watch and witness the shape of things to come.” and he extended a hand towards the cargo container.

On top of the container there was a pile of scrap metal that consisted of several flat irregularly shaped sheets as well as pipes, beams and waste components from mechanical machinery and Teron focused his mind on this as he drew on his feelings about the unseen individual who had just attempted to kill him and thought he

could stand in his way.

Anger.

Hatred.

All of a sudden the scrap metal shifted, moving towards the edge of the container beside which the mystery sniper was concealed. It did not move by much under Teron's influence but it was enough that several key pieces of scrap were no longer supported by the container and they began to topple. In turn this movement destabilised much of the remaining scrap metal and brought it all crashing down onto the sentry's hiding place.

"Now!" Teron snapped at the moment he heard the scream of the sentry as his shelter proved inadequate to protect him from the falling debris and the gang burst out of their hiding place and ran in the direction that their information suggested would lead to the abandoned service tunnels.

As they ran they heard the shout of more members of the now deceased sentry's group calling out. But by this point Teron's gang were ready for trouble and they fired first, sending a quick volley of blaster bolts towards the source of the voices. Whether these hit anything or not did not matter, all that was important was that the gang was able to keep moving and by firing random blaster bolts towards their enemies they hoped to prevent any move to head them off.

"Over there! Look!" Krovak called out as a structure far more solid than most came into view in front of them. This was a squat building set right up against the cavern wall that unlike the surrounding buildings was well built and in good condition. It was obvious that there would be very little room inside if it did not extend back into the rock face and this pointed towards it being the access point to the service tunnels. Teron and his men rushed up to the single door set into the front of the building and took up positions to defend themselves against the gang that controlled this area of the cavern.

"Get it open." Teron ordered about the door.

"It's jammed." Krovak replied, "I don't think it's had any power for decades." and then he ripped open a nearby access panel to reach the mechanism meant to open the door.

At that moment there was a yell and a blaster bolt struck the building close to one of the gang members as the rival gang finally arrived to deal with the intruders. This blaster bolt was followed by more and Teron's men returned fire.

"Krovak hurry." Teron said sternly.

"I'm going as fast as I can." he replied as more blaster fire flew towards them and another of the gang was hit, leaving just three more members apart from Krovak and Teron himself.

"Out of my way!" Teron snapped and he pushed Krovak aside to look at the mechanism himself. While younger Teron had learned to hot wire landspeeders and some parts of the mechanism looked similar. The drawback was the lack of power and there was no obvious means by which any could be got from within the mechanism, meaning that Teron would have to supply it from elsewhere.

Taking his blaster from his holster Teron ignored the continuing blaster fire around him as he ejected the weapon's power pack and held it close to some of the exposed wires. One at a time he broke the wires and touched the new ends to the terminals of the power pack before twisting them back together and moving on to the next wire until all of a sudden there was high pitched shrieking sound from inside the motor that turned to a rumbling as the door began to open.

"Inside!" he yelled, diving through the doorway as soon as the gap was wide enough, causing the door to stop moving.

Inside the structure was dark and the gang had to use glow rods to be able to see properly. But as soon as they looked around it became apparent that this was the place they were looking for. There was another doorway at the far end of the room but this was of a manual type rather than relying on a powered motor to operate while between the two doorways were racks filled with emergency equipment such as glow rods, tool kits and vacuum suits.

"This is it." Krovak said.

"Cover that doorway." Teron told him, "Everyone else suit up and then we'll cover you while you grab a suit as well."

5.

The occupants of the *Swift Exit* and Teron's gang were not the only ones with the idea of leaving the shadow port. Numerous beings moved either singly or in small groups towards what they saw as their only hope of survival. But there were enough of them that in doing so they drew a number of the infected back towards it as well. For the most part these were easy for the Jedi to avoid. The parasite's nature as a creation of the Sith meant that it had a presence more powerful in the Force than a creature of its size would ordinarily possess and immediately upon sensing their presence Jayk and Brae would be able to suggest an alternative if less direct route back to the hangar.

Not all of the danger came from the infected, however and when they heard the sound of blaster fire from close by it became apparent that there were two different armed groups shooting at one another.

"This complicates matters." Tylo said as they paused to consider how to proceed, "If they see us all of this will be for nothing. The second they realise that you two are Jedi they'll decide that all of this is our fault."

Then over the sound of blaster fire there was a high pitched scream.

"That sounded like a child." Brae commented and Tylo winced.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." he said.

"Then stay back here if you don't want to get involved." Jayk said as he ignited his lightsaber, "But Brae and I are going to put a stop to this now." and the two Jedi turned and started walking towards the sounds of battle instead of continuing towards the hangar.

Making their way down a narrow alleyway between two buildings the Jedi came to an area of more open ground where the battle was raging. Two groups of about a dozen were firing on one another but it was clear that they were by no means equal in strength. The first group was centred around a simple wheeled truck that looked like it had the possessions of the group piled high on it. The vehicle had been brought to a halt by a row of spikes dragged in front on a length of synthrope to prevent it from driving any further without ripping apart its tyres. In addition a second row of spikes deployed behind the vehicle prevented it from being reversed. Some of the vehicle's defenders were obviously trying to clear the spikes ahead of them out of the way, but they were at a significant disadvantage from being in the middle of a trap planned in advance and because while they were a mix of adults and children with just a few weapons their attackers were all well armed adults occupying a pair of positions both in front of and behind them.

"This firing will attract the infected." Jayk said, "We need to get that vehicle out of here before they can arrive."

"Perhaps using the Force to remove the spikes blocking its path master?" Brae suggested and Jayk nodded.

"Yes, though we will need to intervene more directly to make sure that the other side cannot just disable the vehicle with their blasters. I'll go first and draw their fire. You try and get around behind the vehicle to deal with that second group while I take care of the ones in front and clear the spikes."

"Yes master." Brae replied before Jayk charged from the alleyway and headed directly towards the front of the trapped vehicle.

"Get back in your vehicle!" he shouted to the two individuals who were attempting to get close enough to the spikes in front of it to clear them. At first they were too startled by the unexpected appearance of the Jedi knight wielding his lightsaber to react but as their attackers turned their attention towards him they hurriedly climbed back aboard it.

Brae took this as her cue to move and darted out of the alleyway. With her lightsaber inactive and by keeping behind every obstruction she could find she was able to make it most of the way to the ambushers' secondary position behind the vehicle. But there was a final area of open ground to cover between her and this position and one of the ambushers was positioned where he would have a commanding view of it.

"Come on Brae. You can do this." she said to herself as she held out her hand and reached out through the Force, seeking to make a connection with the man's mind. Her intention was to try and distract the man, manipulating him into turning away while she moved in close enough to attack. But something went wrong and the moment her mind connected with his he suddenly turned and stared straight at her. He drew in breath to warn his comrades about her presence but before he could get the words out there was the sound of a blaster and a flash of red as he was shot in the neck. Brae looked around towards the source of this attack and saw Tylo leaning over a low wall to provide her with covering fire. She smiled towards the former smuggler even though she knew he would not react in any way that could alert the remaining ambushers to her presence and then broke into a run, charging headlong towards their position.

As she neared their hiding place Brae leapt into the air and activated her lightsaber just as she landed gracefully right in front of one of the men and sliced through him with the weapon. Surprised by this turn of events the remaining men hesitated and in that moment Brae cut down another of them to leave only three remaining.

Seeing that Brae had made it to a position where she was close enough to engage her targets Tylo turned his attention towards Jayk instead. He too was fighting against a group of armed men but they were more spread out than those Brae was fighting and this made it more difficult for him. While he was trying to attack one the others could more easily move around him to attack from a different direction, thus forcing him to break off his own attack to defend against this. But it also meant that Tylo could target them from a distance without worrying about accidentally hitting the Jedi and he quickly picked off one of their number before they even realised he was there.

"Get to the truck!" Jayk shouted, "Be ready on my signal."

Still firing, Tylo emerged from behind the wall and ran for the truck while Brae finished off the last of her opponents off and turned to head for the truck from behind.

"Who are you?" one of the occupants asked as Tylo helped Brae climb aboard the rear section of the vehicle.

"Brae Udra." Brae said, "Jedi."

"Padawan." Tylo commented.

"And he's a nerf herder doing this to stay out of prison." Brae commented and she smirked at Tylo.

"Hey you!" Tylo called out to the driver, "Let me sit there."

"What for?" the driver asked.

"Because me and my friends are risking our lives to save you. So move." Tylo said and the man got out of the seat and let Tylo sit down.

Ahead of the truck Jayk was slowly backing up towards it. But first he had to clear the row of spikes preventing the vehicle from moving. For a moment Tylo thought that the Jedi might accidentally step on one of the spikes himself. However, at the last moment he turned and waved his hand while continuing to use his lightsaber to deflect the blaster bolts coming towards him with his lightsaber in the other. Reaching out with the Force he pushed the row of spike out of the way of the truck and the road ahead of it was suddenly clear.

"That's it." Brae said excitedly to Tylo, "Go." then she gasped as she felt a disturbance in the Force and looked behind the truck to see a crowd of members of various species all rushing towards them with a murderous look in their eyes," Quickly." she added.

Tylo accelerated forwards and as he neared Jayk the Jedi jumped into the air and landed in the back of the truck with Brae.

"Keep going." he said.

"What about these guys shooting at us?" Tylo asked and Jayk looked towards the crowd of infected charging towards them.

"I think they're about to have bigger problems." he said. Then he looked around at the people who had been riding in the truck when it was caught in the ambush. From the looks of them they represented three small family units, "Jedi Knight Jayk Udra." he announced to introduce himself, "I take it that you were heading for the hangar?"

"My brother had a shuttle there." one of the women present replied, nodding, "I know the access code."

"Had?" Brae commented.

"He turned into one of them." the woman replied and she looked behind the truck where the crowd of infected had now caught up with the men who had ambushed it.

"What are they?" the man sat next to her asked.

"We aren't sure exactly." Jayk told him, "But we suspect that what caused this was brought here by someone we have been hunting for some time now."

"And we know one of them was probably one of the first victims." Tylo added from the driver's seat. Then he added, "And hopefully the rest followed soon after."

Beyond the manual door the surviving members of Teron's gang had found the service tunnels they needed. Given that these had not been used or maintained since the facility was still used as a mine it was not surprising that these had collapsed in places. However, the network included manually operated airlocks for use in emergencies and using one of these the gang got out on to the surface of the moon. Out here they were safe from the infected or members of the shadow port's population looking to take advantage of the situation. On the other hand they were being exposed to the radiation from the gas giant but this posed far less of a risk than remaining inside provided that they were able to reach the hangar and get through its magnetic shield quickly. The shield was not intended to do anything more than maintain the atmosphere inside the hangar and so when the gang reached the opening all they had to do was step through and they found themselves back inside the hangar.

Unlike when they had first landed or even when Teron had narrowly escaped being killed by the infected Pulson the hangar was silent and deserted. Everyone who had been in here had either been killed or infected and moved deeper into the caverns in search of further victims to infect.

"The ship's over there. Let's move." Krovak said as he ripped off the helmet of his vacc suit and tossed it aside and the gang began to run. However, as they headed for their transport Teron ground to a sudden halt and stared at a nearby vessel.

"What's wrong?" Krovak asked as he looked at the same ship, a YT-700.

"The *Swift Exit*." Teron said, "Tylo Kurrast's ship."

"Kurrast?" Krovak replied, "What's he doing here?"

"The Jedi must have tracked us here somehow. If they can track our ship then I suggest that we find a different one to leave in."

"Okay you heard Mister Sharr." Krovak announced, "Let's see if any of these are unsecured."

6.

Only when they had reached the hangar and the *Swift Exit* was in sight did Tylo bring the truck to a stop. "Okay this is it." he said as he climbed down from the vehicle, "Everybody out."

"You are sure you can access your brother's vessel?" Jayk asked the woman he had spoken to earlier and she nodded back at him.

"Yes, I've done it before. Look, there it is." she answered and she pointed to a nearby starship that appeared to be in good condition.

"We'll stay here long enough to make sure you get away." Jayk said, "But you must never come back here. What has happened means that no-one will ever be safe here again."

"Don't worry, I'm never coming back here again." the woman said and then she and the others started to unload what possessions they had been able to save from their truck and carry them towards the shuttle.

"We're really staying?" Tylo asked.

"Yes, but not a moment longer than necessary and we'll wait inside the ship. If anything happens we can be out of here in seconds to help." Jayk replied.

"Good. Then let's get a move on." Tylo said as he used his comlink to open the *Swift Exit's* access ramp.

Hurrying inside the ship's occupants all made their way to the cockpit where Tylo began his preflight checks.

"I need to send a signal." Jayk said, "Long range."

"Who to?" Brae asked.

"Anyone close enough to hear." Jayk answered.

"Well the antenna's on line." Tylo said, "You can send when ready." and Jayk leant closer to the communication system.

"This is Jedi Knight Jayk Udra aboard the transport *Swift Exit*. We require urgent assistance in the Uratas system. Any warships in the vicinity should make their way here immediately." he said and then he left the subspace communication system to broadcast his message.

Tylo was soon ready to launch but before they could they had to wait for the families aboard the shuttle to escape. But the moment that the other vessel lifted off and flew out of the hangar Tylo powered up the *Swift Exit's* engines and took off without waiting for any command from Jayk.

Trailing the shuttle out of the hangar they watched as it flew away from the moon under full power before making the jump to hyperspace.

"Are you sure it was a good idea to help them escape?" Tylo asked.

"If any of them were infected we'd have known about it." Brae pointed out.

"Actually I was thinking about how they might tell others about what happened here and cause them to come and try to get a sample of whatever Sith poison did this.

"Hopefully we will be able to find a permanent solution to the issue before that can become a problem." Jayk replied and at the at moment there were several sudden flashes of light in rapid succession and the *Swift Exit's* sensors alerted its occupants to the arrival of several vessels close to their position. There were several smaller vessels, not much larger than the *Swift Exit* itself while at the centre of the formation was a much larger vessel that was obviously the flagship.

"*Swift Exit*, this is the Trade Defence Force missile frigate *Coatnas*. We received your call for help and are here to assist" a deep sounding voice said over the communication channel.

"Missile frigate?" Jayk commented and a smile spread across his face, "I've got an idea." and he reached for the transmitter, "This is Jedi Udra aboard the *Swift Exit* calling the captain of the *Coatnas*." he signalled.

"Go ahead Jedi Udra." the deep voice said again.

"Captain are you carrying a full load of concussion missiles?" Jayk asked.

"Yes, we left port three days ago and haven't seen any combat."

"Good. In that case I want you fire them all at the third moon of this gas giant. Target them at the side furthest from the planet and rig them all for a soft landing."

"Did you just say a soft landing Jedi Udra?" the *Coatnas's* captain asked.

"Yes I did captain." Jayk responded, "I want every missile you have to touch down on that moon without detonating. Then when I give the word I want you to trigger them all by remote control simultaneously."

"Simultaneously?" Brae exclaimed from behind Jayk, "But that amount of explosive power would-"

"It would push the moon out of orbit." Tylo interrupted, smiling as he realised what Jayk's plan was, "Which would then result in it being drawn into the gas giant's gravitational pull and crashing into its atmosphere."

"Destroying it entirely and preventing anyone from retrieving anything else from it." Jayk added.

"What about the people still down there?" Brae asked and Jayk sighed.

"As much as I would like to help anyone that remains uninfected I doubt we could save any of them now. Any rescue team we send in would be at as much risk as them. The only choice left open to us now is to ensure

that whatever was used to create this outbreak never gets off that moon intact.”

“Jedi Udra,” the captain of the Coatnas signalled, “our missiles are ready for launch, programmed for a soft landing followed by remote detonation.”

“Then you may fire at will captain.” Jayk replied and in response trails of fire erupted from the frigates missile tubes as one concussion missile after another was fired towards the surface of the moon where the shadow port was located. But the shadow port itself was not the target and every missile decelerated suddenly before it impacted on the surface so that it landed intact and did not detonate. This was repeated as the launchers were reloaded automatically for more salvos until every missile in the frigate’s arsenal had been fired.

“Jedi Udra, fire mission complete. We have confirmation that every missile has successfully completed soft landing on the moon. We await your order to trigger their detonation sequence.” the captain signalled shortly after the last of the missiles had impacted on the moon’s surface.

“Detonate.” Jayk said flatly.

Outside the Swift Exit’s cockpit canopy the moon was suddenly obscured by a brilliant flash of light as every single missile currently resting on its surface was detonated at the same time. Individually they carried multi-megatonne warheads that were designed to crack open the shielded hulls of capital warships and when combined they represented a devastating amount of raw explosive power, enough to wipe out an entire planetary population if properly targeted. Or enough to knock a small moon out of the delicate position where its distance from the planet it orbited and its speed combined to keep it aloft without it flying off into space.

“It’s working.” Tylo exclaimed, looking at the sensor display in front of him, “The moon’s position has shifted by more than a hundred kilometres. Wait no -two hundred, three. It’s speeding up.”

“Gravity has a hold of it. It will continue to accelerate until it is drawn into the planet’s atmosphere.” Jayk said, “It is just a matter of time now.” then he activated the Swift Exit’s communications again, “Thank you captain. If you don’t mind I’d like you to remain here until the moon impacts with the gas giant. *Swift Exit* out.”

Jayk and the others then sat back and watched as the moon continued to fall towards the gas giant it had orbited perfectly for millions of years. Now in less than a hour it was ripped out of position and fell to its destruction. The moon did not actually impact the gas giant’s atmosphere as a single object, the forces acting on it were far too great for that and it broke up when it about half way between its previous orbit and the upper reaches of the atmosphere to instead become a massive cloud of falling debris that rained down into the gas giant’s atmosphere and produced a firestorm as most of it burnt up before getting deep enough to be crushed by the extremes of pressure at the heart of the planet.

“We’re done here.” Jayk said, “Let’s go home.”

Teron knelt before the holographic communication pad and bowed his head.

“Master.” he said as the device activated.

“Ah my young apprentice.” the hooded figure that appeared said, “You have retrieved what I sent you for?”

“The outpost was located and the substance was still present master.” Teron replied, “But-” and then he trailed off.

“But what? Tell me what happened.” the hooded figure hissed.

“There was an accident.” Teron said, “The cylinder was broken and the contents escaped. I escaped but-”

“You failed me.” the figure said, interrupting, “This is not something you should make a habit of and I am not interested in your excuses. Did you at least manage to copy the contents of the jedi’s computer and return with that?”

“Yes master. I have it on my datapad.” Teron said and beneath the hood of his master a slight smile appeared.

“Good. Then perhaps our plan can continue after all.”